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ABSTRACT

This study identified distinguished children's books read by students attending two elementary schools in Honolulu, Hawaii, and analyzed the effect of reading ability on children's choice of reading material. Average reading scores on the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT) were above the norm for students attending one school and at or below the norm for students attending the other school. Data were collected from filled library circulation cards that the school librarians had retained for a 5-year period from September 1975 to June 1979. "Distinguished" books were defined as children's classics, award-winning titles, and honor books. Titles were divided into five categories: Easy Fiction, Juvenile Fiction, Folk Literature and Fairy Tales, Poetry and Verse, and Information and Concept Books. Significantly more titles classified as easy circulated to students attending the school with lower average reading scores, while significantly more titles classified as juvenile fiction circulated to students attending the school with higher average reading scores. The data indicated that reading ability is an influential factor in elementary school students' preferences for distinguished children's books. A list of 88 distinguished titles that circulated frequently and a 6-item bibliography are included in this report. (Author/ESR)

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ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS' PREFERENCES FOR DISTINGUISHED CHILDREN'S BOOKS

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ABSTRACT

This study identified distinguished children's books read by students attending two elementary schools in Hawaii. Average reading scores on the Stanford Achievement test were above the norm for students attending one school and at the norm or below for students attending the other school. Data were collected from filled library circulation cards that the school librarians had retained for a five-year period, September 1975 to June 1979. "Distinguished" books were defined as children's classics, award-winning titles, and honor books. Significantly more distinguished titles classified as "Easy" circulated to students attending the school with lower average reading scores. Significantly more distinguished titles classified as "Juvenile Fiction" circulated to students attending the school with higher average reading scores. The data indicate that reading ability is an influential factor in elementary school students' preferences for distinguished children's books. A list of distinguished titles that circulated frequently is appended.

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Teachers and librarians actively encourage elementary school children to read distinguished children's books, but books that have won recognition for literary merit must compete for children's attention with television, after-school activities, and less meritorious books with high appeal. Despite this competition, teachers and librarians have succeeded in motivating children to read the best in children's literature.

Aborn (1974) reported on a successful reading program that promoted Newbery Medal winners. She found that elementary school students were discriminating readers of award-winning books, enjoying some titles and rejecting others. Summer of the Swans, Amos Fortune, Free Man, and Sounder elicited favorable responses from the students. The Cat Who Went to Heaven, Strawberry Girl, and The Trumpeter of Krakow drew critical comments although a few children enjoyed The Cat Who Went to Heaven. Sixth grade students who were involved in another program that promoted both Nebery Medal winners and Newbery Honor books voted as overall favorites in three successive years The Egypt Game, The Cricket in Times Square, and Old Yeller (Pileri, 1981). Shackford (1977) relied on interviews with librarians in her study of children's preferences for Newbery Medal winners. The interviews indicated that Matchlock Gun, Johnny Tremain, Rabbit Hill, The Door in the Wall, and Island of the Blue Dolphins were popular titles. The High King was enjoyed by readers who like adventure and fantasy and are able to cope with the complexity of that story. Librarians did not think that Ginger Pye and The Bronze Bow were popular with children.

Holloman (1974) described a third grade curriculum unit, "The Caldecott Medal Winners," that integrated language, letter writing, researching, reading, reading aloud, dramatization, art and art appreciation. Kauth (1974) motivated children's interest in Caldecott Medal winners by writing

original stories that have the titles of winners of the award imbedded in the narrative.

Bauer and Sanborn (1981) identified children's books that had been selected as winners or finalists in awards determined by adults (John Newbery Medal, Caldecott Medal, National Book Award, Boston Globe-Horn Book Award, and Notable Children's Books) and were also winners of reader's choice awards. Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIHM, The Mouse and the Motorcycle, Old Yeller, Rascal, and The Trumpet of the Swan were the distinguished titles most frequently chosen by children for awards.

METHOD

The study described here was designed to identify children's classics and award-winning titles that circulated frequently over a five-year period from two elementary school libraries in the Honolulu, Hawaii area. The students' reading scores on the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT) differed between the two schools. In School A the fourth grade students were reading at grade level in every year except for one year when they were reading below grade level. The sixth grade students in School A read below grade level every year. In School B both the fourth and sixth grade students scored above grade level every year.

The average student population of School A during the five years of this study was 843. The average student population of School B during this period was 687.

The librarians of the two schools retained filled circulation cards for a five-year period from September 1974 to June 1979. Frequency of circulation was noted for each distinguished title. This study assumed that charging out a book expressed a preference for it.

"Distinguished" titles were defined as:

1. Children's classics. (Cl) Pre-1915 titles that have withstood the test of time.
2. Contemporary classics (CCl) Post-1915 titles now recognized as distinguished children's literature that received no award at the time of publication.
3. Children's versions of classics from traditional literature (TrCl)
4. Award-winning titles and honor books
   a. The Newbery Medal (N)
   b. Newbery Honor Book (NH)
   c. The Caldecott Medal (C)
   d. Caldecott Honor Book (CH)
   e. The National Book Award (NBA)
   f. National Book Award Leading Contenders (NBA-LC)
   g. The Carnegie Medal (CM)
   h. The Kate Greenaway Medal (KGM)
   i. The Canadian Library Awards (CLA)
   j. International Reading Association Children's Book Award (IRA)
   k. Jane Addama Award (JAA)

Titles were divided into five categories:

Easy Fiction

Juvenile Fiction

Folk Literature and Fairy Tales

Poetry and Verse

Information Books and Concept Books

FINDINGS

In both schools only about twenty percent of the titles in the library collection circulated frequently enough to fill one circulation card during the five-year study. Titles identified in the data collected from the two schools, therefore, are among the top fifth in popularity from among the books in the two library collections.

Total circulation recorded from the filled circulation cards for School A was 42,782; for School B it was 35,504. Circulation of distinguished titles for School A was 4,393; for School B it was 2,778. There were 150 distinguished titles included in the sample from School A and eighty-nine from School B. Forty-seven distinguished titles were included in the sample from both schools. The combined total of separate distinguished titles for the two schools, therefore, was 192. Of the total circulation for School A, 10.27 percent was for distinguished titles while for School B it was 7.82 percent. Mean circulation of distinguished titles for School A was 29.29; for School B it was 31.21. Mean circulation for the combined data was 37.35, this larger figure being due to the higher circulation for the forty-seven duplicate titles. Median circulation for School A was twenty-six; for School B it was 27. Median circulation for the combined data was twenty six.

When circulation data were normalized for student population and analyzed using the Chi-square test, significant differences ($p. < .001$) were found in the circulation of distinguished titles between the two schools in two categories, easy fiction and juvenile fiction. School A, the school in which the students had lower reading scores, overcirculated easy fiction and undercirculated juvenile fiction. School B, the school

in which the students had above average reading scores, overcirculated juvenile fiction and undercirculated easy fiction. Circulation between the two schools did not differ for folk literature and fairy tales. Circulation of poetry and verse and information and concept books was too small to be educationally significant.

Table I shows the distinguished titles that circulated twenty-seven or more times, above the median for the combined data.

CONCLUSIONS

It is apparent from this study that elementary school students read distinguished children's books. The children in both schools preferred distinguished titles with a suspenseful story. They also enjoyed humor and a protagonist with whom they could identify. Most of the titles listed above are also examples of excellent literary style. The percentage of distinguished titles that circulated to the children in these two schools when compared to the total circulation from the two schools was 9.16 percent. This is a very satisfactory proportion of distinguished titles.

Children attending a school with recorded Stanford Achievement Test (SAT) scores averaging at or below national norms preferred distinguished titles that were easy to read. Children attending a school with SAT scores averaging above national norms preferred more challengning titles. The circulation of distinguished titles in the two schools may reflect concerned and astute reading guidance from teachers and librarians who knew their students' reading ability and recommended appropriate books to them. It is also possible that the children were choosing books that parents, teachers, or librarians had already read to them because they tend to enjoy reading

books with which they are familiar. But whether the children were guided or not, the data indicate that reading ability is an influential factor in children's preferences for distinguished titles.

Many children's classics and award-winning titles retain their appeal for children despite the competition of newer media and a proliferation of high-interest library materials. The results of this study show that elementary school teachers and librarians should continue to encourage their students to read distinguished children's books. Teachers and librarians should also note that many of the distinguished titles preferred by children in this study are excellent read-aloud books. They may wish to stimulate children's interest in these distinguished titles through a planned program of sharing literature with children.

TABLE I

CIRCULATION OF DISTINGUISHED TITLES ABOVE THE MEDIAN

Author and Title	Circulation School A	School B	Total	Reason for "Distinguished"
EASY FICTION				
Potter, The Tale of Peter Rabbit	134	74	208	Cl
Seuss, If I Ran the Zoo	84	56	140	CH, 1951
Ward, The Biggest Bear	84	53	137	C, 1953
Seuss, McElligott's Pool	80	56	136	CH, 1948
Bemelmans, Madeline's Rescue	83	52	135	C, 1954
Potter, The Tale of Mrs. Tittlemouse	82	48	130	Cl
Steig, Sylvester and the Magic Pebble	52	56	108	C, 1970
Daugherty, Andy and the Lion	81	14	95	CH, 1939
Sendak, Where the Wild Things Are	28	53	81	C, 1964
Potter, The Tailor of Gloucester	80	--	80	Cl
Lionni, Frederick	30	40	70	CH, 1968
Bemelmans, Madeline	68	--	68	CH, 1940
Potter, The Tale of Benjamin Bunny	40	28	68	Cl
Gag, Nothing at All	28	28	56	CH, 1942
Lobel, Frog and Toad Together	28	27	55	NH, 1973
DeRegniers, May I Bring A Friend?	26	28	54	C, 1965
Lionni, Swimmy	--	54	54	CH, 1964
Seuss, Bartholomew and the Oobleck	26	28	54	CH, 1950
Sendak, In the Night Kitchen	25	28	53	CH, 1971
Potter, The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin	26	26	52	Cl
Tresselt, White Snow, Bright Snow	52	--	52	C, 1948
Krauss, The Happy Day	25	25	50	CH, 1950

Author and Title	Circulation School A	School B	Total	Reason for "Distinguished"
EASY FICTION (cont'd.)				
Zolotow, Mr. Rabbit and the Lovely Present	41	--	41	CH, 1963
Potter, The Tale of the Flopsy Bunnies	40	--	40	Cl
Udry, The Moon Jumpers	39	--	39	CH, 1960
Brown, A Child's Good Night Book	28	--	28	CH, 1944
Brown, The Little Island	--	28	28	C, 1947
Burton, The Little House	28	--	28	C, 1943
Gag, Millions of Cats	28	--	28	NH, 1929
Graham, Timothy Turtle	28	--	28	CH, 1947
Lobel, Frog and Toad Are Friends	--	28	28	CH, 1971
Potter, The Roly Poly Pudding	28	--	28	Cl
Potter, The Tale of Mr. Tod	28	--	28	Cl
Minarik, Little Bear's Visit	27	--	27	CH, 1962
Potter, The Tale of Tom Kitten	27	--	27	Cl
JUVENILE FICTION				
White, Charlotte's Web	304	119	423	NH, 1953
Milne, Winnie-the-Pooh	26	112	138	CCl
Gannett, My Father's Dragon	52	80	132	NH, 1949
L'Engle, A Wrinkle in Time	25	66	91	N, 1963
Atwater, Mr. Popper's Penguins	--	83	83	NH, 1939
Lawson, Rabbit Hill	26	28	54	N, 1945
Burnford, The Incredible Journey	--	52	52	CLA, 1963

Author and Title	Circulation School A	School B	Total	Reason for "Distinguished"
JUVENILE FICTION (cont'd.)				
Irving, The Legend of Sleepy Hollow	52	--	52	C1
_____, Rip Van Winkle	52	--	52	C1
Dickens, The Magic Fishbone	50	--	50	C1
Selden, The Cricket in Times Square	15	28	43	NH, 1961
Cleary, Ramona and Her Father	--	42	42	NH, 1978
Gipson, Old Yeller	14	28	42	NH, 1957
Lewis, the Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe	14	26	40	CC1
Twain, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer	15	25	40	C1
Alcott, Little Women	--	39	39	C1
Collodi, Pinocchio	39	--	39	C1
O'Dell, Island of the Blue Dolphins	25	14	39	N, 1961
Adams, Watership Down	--	29	29	CM, 1972
Byars, Summer of the Swans	15	14	29	N, 1971
Babbitt, The Devil's Storybook	--	28	28	NBA-LC, 1975
Kipling, The Just-So Stories	--	28	28	C1
Norton, The Borrowers	--	28	28	CM, 1952
O'Brien, Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIHM	--	28	28	N, 1972
Steig, Dominic	--	28	28	NBA-LC, 1973
Wilder, On the Banks of Plum Creek	--	28	28	NH, 1938
Wyss, The Swiss Family Robinson	14	14	28	C1
Wilde, The Selfish Giant	--	27	27	C1

Author and Title	Circulation School A	School B	Total	Reason for "Distinguished"
FOLK LITERATURE AND FAIRY TALES				
Mosel, The Funny Little Woman	41	70	111	C, 1973
Brown, Once a Mouse	25	51	76	C, 1962
Haley, A Story, A Story	43	28	71	C, 1971
Aesopus, Aesop's Fables (Harris, ed.)	68	--	68	Cl
Colum, Legends of Hawaii	55	--	55	TrCl
Mother Goose (Wright, illus.)	26	28	54	TrCl
DePaola, Strega Nona	15	28	43	CH, 1976
Grimm, Fairy Tales	41	--	41	TrCl
Spier, The Fox Went Out on a Chilly Night	14	27	41	CH, 1962
Andersen, The Nightingale	15	25	40	Cl
Grimm, Snow White and Rose Red	14	26	40	TrCl
McDermott, Anansi, The Spider	15	14	29	CH, 1973
Aesopus, Aesop's Fables (Untermeyer, comp.)	--	28	28	Cl
Andersen, The Ugly Duckling	28	--	28	Cl
The House That Jack Built (Chast, illus.)	14	14	28	TrCl
McDermott, Arrow to the Sun	14	14	28	C, 1975
Perrault, Cinderella (Brown, illus.)	28	--	28	C, 1955
Small, Baba Yaga	14	14	28	TrCl
The Three Billy Goats Gruff (Brown, illus.)	14	14	28	TrCl
Jeffers, Three Jovial Huntsmen	13	14	27	CH, 1974

Author and Title	Circulation School A	School B	Total	Reason for "Distinguished"
POETRY AND VERSE				
Moore, The Night Before Christmas	54	30	84	C1
Stevenson, A Child's Garden of Verse	51	--	51	C1
Zemach, The Judge	14	14	28	CH, 1970
INFORMATION AND CONCEPT BOOKS				
Gag, ABC Bunny	52	--	52	NH, 1934
Carson, The Sea Around Us	--	28	28	CC1
Totals	2,910	2,291	5,201	

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